<u>Title:</u> Skill-Building Course: Spirit & Soul

<u>Description:</u> This course is designed assist a Whole Health Coach or other educator working with Veterans who would like to incorporate "Spirit & Soul: Growing & Connecting" into their Personal Health Plans. It reviews six different "subtopics" related to this aspect of self-care, designed to give Veterans additional ideas, insight, and resources to support them on their Whole Health journey.

Objectives and Key Points

- Define "religion," "spirituality" and "soul"
- Discuss how Spirit & Soul is linked to health
- Explore and more clearly identify one's beliefs and values
- Discuss how Veterans' health can be influenced by moral injury, grief, and forgiveness, and how self-care and care by the health care team can support work in these aspects of life
- Experience a mindful awareness exercise related to Spirit and Soul
- Learn from a chaplain about the role of chaplains in the VA, experiencing an exercise or practice they might offer a Veteran in their care
- Identify local resources that can support Veterans with this aspect of self care at a local level
- Create a Personal Health Plan focused on one aspect of Spirit & Soul

Sample Agenda (total time 60-80 minutes)

- Ground Rules, Definitions, and Why Spirit & Soul Matter (5-10 minutes)
- Exercise: Exploring Values, Meaning and Purpose with a Partner (10-15 minutes)
- Exercise: Spiritual Practices and Mindful Awareness (10-15 minutes)
- Grief, Moral Injury, Recovery (5-10 minutes)
- Chaplains and other experts, with discussion/demo (15 minutes)
- Partner activity: Setting a Spirit & Soul goal, large group sharing (15 minutes)
- Wrap up, questions, and evaluations

Preparation

- 1. Pre-Reading for Instructors
 - Passport to Whole Health, Chapter 19. Spirit & Soul: Growing and Connecting.
 Available at https://wholehealth.wiscweb.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/414/2018/09/Passport-to-Whole-Health-3rd-Edition-2018.pdf. Pay particular attention to the clinical tools. Chapter 7, Personal Development, features a Forgiveness clinical tool that may be relevant as well
 - It might help to keep a list of all your different ideas for "making one small change"
 - Be willing to share a little about your own definitions of spirituality and religion
 - The Whole Health Library has a number of additional materials that are worth a look. https://wholehealth.wisc.edu/overviews/spirit-soul/. Be sure to look over the Spirit & Soul overview, as time allows

2. Prepare course materials and handouts

- We strongly encourage you to have a conversation with local chaplain services to have them partner with you to teach this course. Ideally, they can also demonstrate one of the exercises or activities they might do with a Veteran
- Read over the script for the mindful awareness exercise in advance
- Each participant will receive a copy of the Veteran Handout designed to accompany this course. It may be easiest to have handouts at participants' seats when they arrive, or you can pass them around later. Review the handout in advance, so you can be ready for questions
- You will need sheets of paper and pencils/pens for the mindful awareness experience
- You may wish to provide some additional Veteran handouts related to Spirit & Soul, available at https://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/veteran-handouts/index.asp#spirit-and-soul
- Be sure to have an evaluation form ready to give them at the end as well. There is a general evaluation form that is provided as part of the materials for this course

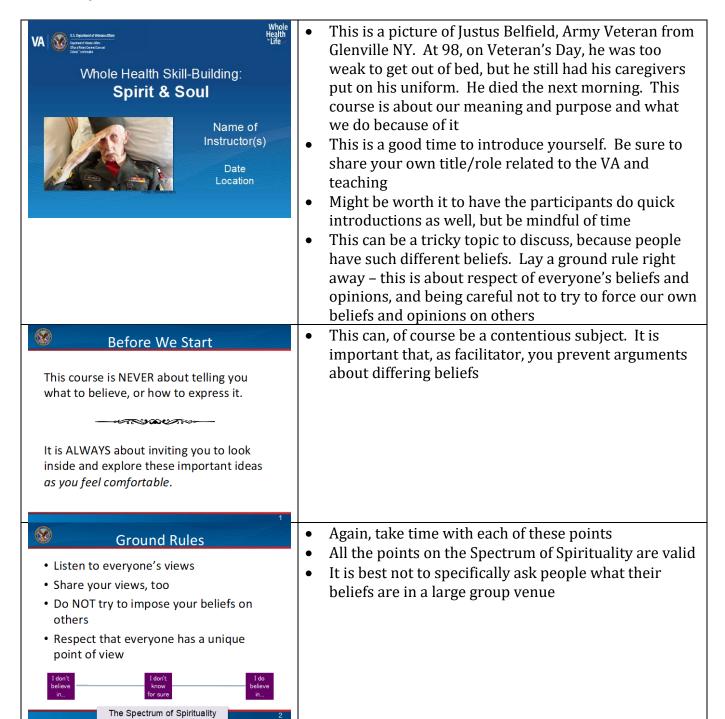
3. Set up AV and other equipment

- Be prepared to share the PowerPoint slides related to this course. A guide to each of the individual slides is featured later in this document
- Connect with the AV support person at your site
- A flip chart and markers, or a dry erase board, may be helpful
- If you do not have a slide projector, you can simply take them through the Veteran handout after you give each person a copy. Alternatively, you can print out the slides and give them copies. Then, just take them through the slides, following the faculty guide

4. Identify local and other resources

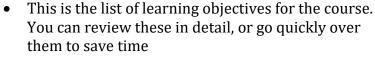
- You should know how to contact the chaplains at your site. Are there other churches/clergy that are especially important in your local community? It may be helpful to know them/reach out to them as well
- Add to the slide set (and/or Veteran Handout) to include local resources, including classes, group visits, and group therapy sessions available locally
- Develop your own list of favorite resources to share

Slide-By-Slide Guide

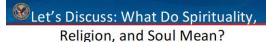


Today, we will talk about

- What "Spirit & Soul" means
- How spirituality and religion are linked to health
- Identifying your views on meaning and purpose
- · Working with grief and forgiveness
- · How experts like chaplains and clergy can help
- How to set a goal related to Spirit & Soul
- Where you can learn even more about this



- As you move through, remember the subtitle for this circle is "Growing & Connecting." Spiritual issues are connected to every other part of our lives and all the other self-care topics
- The main message here is that you will benefit from taking time to explore what gives you a sense of meaning and purpose. Build off that central question of "What really matters to me?"
- Highlight Spirit & Soul's location on the circle
- Can read the quotation and ask them if they agree, if time permits



You can't have a physical transformation until you have a spiritual transformation - Cary Booker



Examples of Definitions

- Religion a body of beliefs shared by a community
- Spirituality directly experiencing the sacred
- Soul what makes something or someone alive
- A person can be spiritual, religious, and soulful at the same time

- Be sure to point out that while it is important to think about definitions, there is a lot of overlap
- Some people may describe themselves as not spiritual and religious. There will still be suggestions in this module that can be of use to them. It can help simply to ask, "What gives me a sense of meaning and purpose?"

Spirit and Soul may include

- Meaning and purpose, what we value
- Seeking well-being, inner freedom, and inner peace
- Living, flourishing, and being resilient when challenges come
- Connecting with others, or with something beyond us. Belonging
- Being in the present moment (mindful awareness)

 This slide is optional, for if you feel you want to go deeper with defining Spirit and Soul

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Spirituality and Religion-

Why They Matter

- Survival: Attending religious services at least once a week decreases risk of death by 23%
- Coping: Spirituality and religion help people handle things better, including overall stress, cancer, chronic diseases, natural disasters, and the effects of war



Spirituality and religion have powerful links to health.
 Most studies have involved religious attendance. The
 benefits occurred regardless of which religion a
 person belongs to, so long as it is a positive
 experience for them



Spirituality and Religion-

More on Why They Matter

- Mental health: Tying them in with mental health care (when patients want to) improves outcomes
- Healthy behavior: People are less likely to smoke, drink, etc.
- · Benefits of prayer:
 - Prayer activates different parts of the brain
 - Seems to help with chronic pain and mood problems



Photo: pinterest.com

- Take your time reading through these
- Prayer studies have focused on prayer being done by people who belong to multiple different religions



Mindful Awareness-

Spirit & Soul Writing Exercise

- An important piece of self-care is connecting with what gives you meaning and purpose
- This is an exercise to help with that
- Note what comes up for you thoughts, emotions, sensations – as you work through this exercise
- There will be time to discuss as a group when we finish

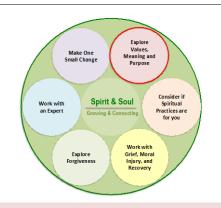


Photo: emptygatezen.com

- The template for this meditation is included with the course materials
- They will need paper and a writing implement
- Be sure to allow time for discussion when completed



- This circle summarizes some general topics that can guide Veterans when they add Spirit and Soul as part of their Personal Health Plans
- Read the name of each circle. We'll cover them one at a time going clockwise
- There is some overlap between the different topics



- The first topic is about exploring values, meaning, and purpose. This ties closely to the key personal health planning step of asking what really matters, and outlining Mission, Aspiration, and Purpose
- If you wish, and if time allowed, you could take them through the "Values: Figuring Out What Matters Most" Clinical Tool in the *Passport to Whole Health*, Chapter 11, but this may not be appropriate for all reading levels

An important part of self-care is self-awareness

- Part of your health plan may simply be to move forward on your spiritual "quest" in whatever way you feel is appropriate
- Take time to think about questions like:
 - o What happens when we die?
 - o Why is there suffering?
 - o Are miracles possible?
 - o How do you decide what is true for you?

Six Aspects of Spirituality → Religious → Humanistic → Nature → Experiential → Cosmos → Mystery Six Aspects of Spirituality You might find that more than one of these apply to you. Also, you might be drawn to others besides these.

- This is an exercise designed to help people broaden their concept of what spirituality is
- Many people equate spirituality and religion, which may not sit well for everyone. There are other ways to think about it

1. Religious

Closeness and connection to the sacred as described by a specific religion. Sense of closeness to a particular Higher Power

- 83% of US adults belong to a religious group
- 91% believe in God or a universal spirit



- Definition pretty clear in the slide
- Can remind them of the definition of religion discussed earlier: "A religion is a body of beliefs shared by a community"

2. Humanistic Spirituality



Closeness and connection to humankind.

May involve feelings of love, reflection, service, and altruism.

- The soldier is Dave Eubank, who has just helped a little girl who was surrounded by ISIS soldiers, to escape
- Health care providers, police officers, teachers, and people in the military often relate to this aspect of spirituality

3. Nature Spirituality

Closeness and connection to nature or the environment. Like the wonder you feel walking in the woods or watching a sunrise.

An important focus for many traditional healing approaches.



 This is another one that is important to many Veterans – love of the natural world



4. Experiential spirituality



- Shaped by personal life events
- Influenced by our individual stories
- Informed by what we love to do and be
- Experience in war influences Veterans profoundly

- What happens to us shapes who we are and what we believe, too
- The guy in the top picture is Noah Galloway, a Veteran who was on Dancing With the Stars despite having lost an arm and a leg in Iraq
- Military experience will certainly shape your spiritual perspectives



5. Cosmos Spirituality

- Feeling connected to all of creation.
- Can come up when you think about just how big it all is...
- ...like when you look up at the stars or down at a handful of grains of sand



Photo: Sweetle 187 via Foter.co



• Can ask them for other examples that make them feel that sense of the 'bigness' of it all – seeing the ocean, looking out over the Grand Canyon, etc.



6. Mystery



• Many people will say they are agnostic, that there is just a lot we don't know for sure

Partner Exercise-

Your Spiritual Perspective

Consider the six different aspects of spirituality (and others you may think of)

- 1) Religious
- 2) Humanistic
- 3) Nature
- 4) Experiential
- 5) Cosmos
- 6) Mystery
- Which ones resonate with you the most, and why?
- How might your views influence how you take care of yourself?
- As with all activities, this is optional
- Give people at least 3 minutes each to speak. Keep track of time
- Remind them of the ground rules
- The person listening should truly listen, letting the other person share in as much depth as they would like without interruptions



• The next topic relates to whether or not you want to explore having a "Spiritual Practice"

What is a Spiritual Practice?

- Something you do that reminds you about what really matters
- An activity that brings peace and ease
- Something that helps you feel a sense of connection to something more



- Take time to read this slide carefully
- Can ask if anyone has a spiritual practice they would like to share about
- Again, you decide if any of these suggestions are relevant to you

What is a Spiritual Practice?

- Other Examples
- Carrying an "anchor"
- Holidays
- Pilgrimage
- Meditation
- Music and Art
- Joining a community
- Gratitude
- Compassion
- Forgiveness - 12-Step Programs
- You decide!



- Again, can invite people to share as time allows
- An anchor is an object that has meaning for you that you can take with you, like a photo, a small stone, a necklace, etc. It anchors you to what gives you meaning and purpose, because you can look at it whenever you need a reminder about those things
- 12-step programs, such as those with Alcoholics Anonymous, link many people to spiritual practices



- These topics are heavy they can bring up a lot of emotions and memories
- Remind people that writing a health plan need not mean tackling their greatest challenges first, or tackling them all at once
- These are mentioned briefly as some food for thought about areas they may wish to explore as part of their self-care at some point, when they are ready



Grief

- · More than an emotion
- Tied to physical and mental problems
- Complicated grief (7% of the time)
- Veterans were trained to be stoic, and that can cause problems with healing grief
- · Important to have support



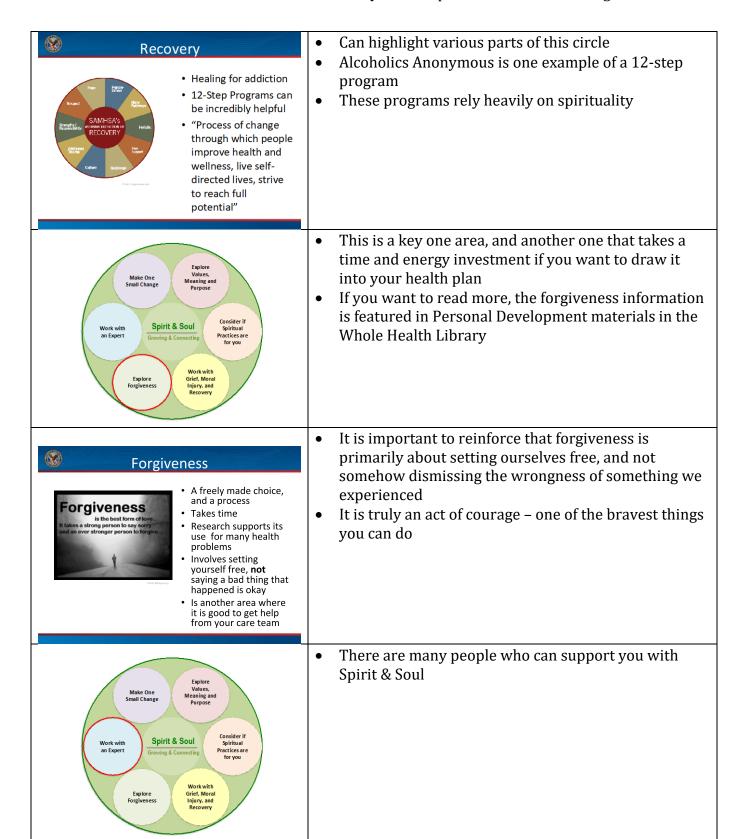
- There is an entire grief module in the Whole Health Library
- Complicated grief is grief that doesn't get easier with time and that interferes with a person's ability to live their life



Moral Injury



- · Someone did something, saw something, or couldn't prevent something that was against their deepest moral beliefs
- This causes them not to trust themselves or others
- Can be tied to medical problems
- · Commonly happens during
- Probably would not encourage too much large group or partner sharing with this topic, given this is a lecture unto itself and a very emotionally-laden topic
- Can say you just want to make them familiar with the concept



Spirit and Soul: Experts Chaplains - Can help people from many religions and CHAPLAIN SERVICES VA has a strong chaplaincy presence - They an cover many topics · Death and dving • Meaning of illness and suffering: "Why is this • Feelings of spiritual anxiety, guilt, anger, loss, and despair Psychologists and others (clergy, pastors, ministers, rabbis, etc.) can help with grief, forgiveness, recovery, and moral injury too Try it out! Demonstration

 After you review this slide, ask them if they have other ideas in addition to this list

 This is an opportunity for you to invite a VA chaplain to share what chaplains do, how to contact them, and some of the activities or tools that they might use with the Veterans in their care



 And finally, we come to the last circle. Anything is fair game here – options we have discussed so far, or others we haven't

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Set a Goal!

Make One Small Change

All the topics we have talked about can guide you

- Clarify your beliefs and values
- Decide if you want to start a practice
- Work with grief, moral injury, and/or recovery
- Forgive
- Talk to a chaplain or other professional

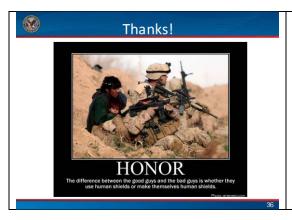
There are many small changes you can make. Examples:

- Carry a photo of someone important to you
- Read something inspirational
- Offer gratitude
- Do a random act of kindness each day
- As the instructor, you can read all the items on this list, or just let them read them silently (remember, not everyone can read well), or highlight a few of your favorites
- Ask them if they have other thoughts, beyond those we have discussed

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The temptation is always to spend more time on Your Turn lecture and less on experiential activities or skillbuilding. Give this last exercise at least 15 minutes · Work with a partner Some people may be hesitant, but encourage them to Take turns work with someone else if at all possible. If not, they · Come up with a personal goal related to can still set a goal on their own, and you can check in Spirit & Soul for your with them while others are working in pairs Personal Health Plan · You will be invited to If there are an odd number of people, you can always share yours with the jump into the mix and pair with someone yourself group, if you want Be sure to set a timer to remind them to switch who is doing the talking/planning halfway through Take time for a large group discussion, and invite people to share their goals *Be sure to focus on accountability – how can they check in with their partner (text, coffee, email, etc.)? When? Can you as the instructor check in with them at some point? Be sure to talk about their next steps with all of this work You can leave this slide up while they are talking to **Setting Goals** their partner. It can help them create stronger goals Seven steps in goal setting Up to you if you want to read through it or simply **SMART Goals** 1. Identify the goal have them read to themselves Specific 2. Know the benefits Measurable 3. Know obstacles · Action-based 4. List skills and knowledge needed Realistic 5. Identify who can help Time-bound 6. Develop a plan (SMART) 7. Set a timeline and next Feel free to modify this based on which points you Spirit & Soul chose to emphasize Summing Up 1. Start by asking: What gives me a sense of meaning and purpose (What really matters?) 2. Remember, this area is closely tied to health in many ways 3. There are many options. Pick one and take it at a pace that works for you 4. Working with Spirit & Soul takes courage. You've got this!

5. What is one way you can do some good today?



- Read the caption of this slide aloud, since the font is small
- As you finish, be sure to leave time for questions and comments
- There is a general evaluation form you can pass out that is included in the course materials